



Calgary Medical
Students Association

1st Echidna Town Hall

May 26, 2021



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Introduction

The CMSA had our first Echidna class town hall on May 26, 2021. There were many concerns brought up to the executive independently. However, we wanted to get a better idea of what was affecting the class as a whole. Additionally, we wanted to present information discussed at our meetings that may not be known to the full class.

The town hall was hosted on Zoom and had interactive components using Slido. A student wellness survey was distributed to the class in the week prior to the event. Students were reminded to respond to the survey during the meeting and provided with a link if needed. Slido allowed students to submit responses to questions or prompts anonymously and allowed interaction with comments/concerns so that the most popular ones were upvoted and increased in priority by the student body.

Approximately 65 students attended the townhall. There was strong interaction from the student body, with many students commenting and chiming in in both the Zoom chat and by unmuting and speaking up. Slido increased student interaction with 22 students participating in the Wellness Word Cloud and 29 questions posed in Slido during the Open Q&A.

The notes from the town hall are presented below. Responses and/or discussion pertaining to a question or concern posed is indicated in grey. A summary from the meeting with the Deans on May 28th is also available at the end (Appendix B).



May 26, 2021

Tuition Updates

CMSA President Mathieu Chin president updates on the incoming tuition increases and what impacts it had for our class and the future incoming classes.

Council Update

- Proposed increase is supposed to happen
- The Echidnas and the incoming class (2024) will be grandfathered into the current rate, save a couple \$ here and there
- For the class of 2025 however, the tuition will increase. We pay ~\$16000, the 2025s will pay around \$19000
- In discussion with Dr. Naugler right now, government budget cuts are the predominant reason for the increase
- We also have one of the lowest tuition rates in the country, so that is another reason
- A survey was sent out in in February—most people did not want increases, but if there were, students want the funds to go to student issues
 - In our case, these would go to bursaries, SAW, and the brand-new curriculum
 - A new curriculum will be in place in about 2-3 years

Student Comments & Concerns

- Would like to see financial statements so we can see where the money goes
 - #1 cost is SG preceptors and live zoom lectures
- A concern is the bursary system: the language around bursary applications is tough to decipher for most people, this is even more challenging for BIPOC applicants. This combined with the tuition increases barriers in medicine
- Why is the increase going towards bursaries for students struggling to pay for tuition when we're struggling ourselves?

Student Wellness

CMSA VP SAW Natalya Patrick presented an update on student wellness, initiatives that have taken place to combat issues, and future events that will take place. Suggestions were also crowdsourced from the class about events/initiatives they would like to see.

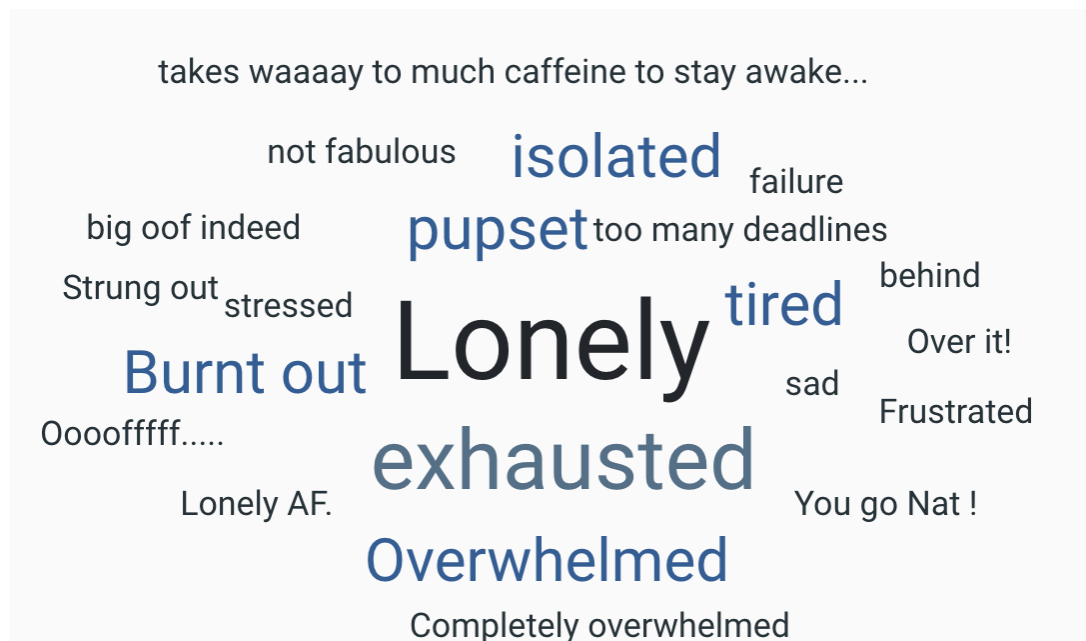


Council Update

- Thank you all who brought up concerns
- Our class isn't the best place in terms of mental health right now, with COVID and Course 4
- 95% of people who have responded to the survey have experienced burnout
- We have tried to target that with mental health initiatives such as mental health awareness week, silent library, etc
- We have the Julian Sacher event tomorrow (May 27, 2021)
- We are welcoming more suggestions from the students

How are we feeling?

Students were asked to submit a response on Slido to the above question, which were used to generate the word cloud shown below. Words presented in larger font sizes were most often repeated by the students. Appendix A has all student responses.



Student Comments & Concerns



- The current UME policy is 14 business days to return a quiz but that's impossible to change your study habits to adjust
- Concerns are surrounding the uncertainty around things—i.e. handing in an assignment and not getting grades back from a long time
- I think we need more transparency regarding our exam grades and also transparency around which questions are dropped and why
- There used to be an exam rep (student) that went to all exam meetings, along with the course rep, and they used to share why those were dropped. That changed a couple years ago, but I'm not sure why, and it doesn't seem student friendly.
 - Unfortunately, the exam rep does not get any more information than everyone else regarding the reason questions are dropped or when we get out marks back
- Would like a greater definition around what is an AEBM elective and better communication between the UME and clinical placements because everyone is getting different experiences
- There is a disparity between experiences with career coaches
- Will things return to in person once the July timeline with the easing of restrictions occur?
- I don't know how hard and fast the rule is (I'm assuming very) but the mental health aspect of not knowing if we're writing an exam (and then maybe having to study during our break) is a lot. Would they ever consider having a virtual final giving our current situation?
 - The issue is a privacy issue, since proctoring involves the installation of spyware. Mike Paget was strongly opposed to proctoring exams because of this reason, as the spyware is difficult to/cannot be removed between exams.
- Why not zoom proctoring?
- Or do they have a date when they would tell us if the exam is going ahead or not?

Suggestions for Wellness

- A student/small group competition to win money for a virtual small group dinner
 - A virtual dinner would probably have to fall under a specific club (the Endowment fund is for things that enhance medical education specifically. We can also find ways to work this into our CMSA events budget.
- Virtual charcuterie boards
- Virtual stamped themed pancake breakfast



Academic Concerns

CMSA VP Academics Scott Bell and Erica Lindquist presented an academic update highlighted some of the concerns brought to them by the student body.

Council Update

- We will be having a clerkship meeting soon with Dr. Busche soon. We are waiting on CaRMS to set a timeline so that we can book our lottery in the fall
- Anatomy is a big concern. With the new plan for opening, the anatomy team wants to get us in as quick as we can
- Erica, Scott and the Anatomy rep will discuss this with the anatomy team soon
- Many people have been concerned with the high LoA rate
- New curriculum coming class for of 2025. Great opportunity to bring in more representative content. Look for opportunities to contribute.

Student Comments & Concerns

- When we are not allowed to review the exams and learn from our mistakes within the exam, it creates a culture that prioritizes the grades over the learning of the material.
 - Brought this forward and Dr. Weeks told that there is no benefit reviewing...based on what research and nothing
- Apparently, the anatomy team is limited with staff resources compared to other universities. I think we should raise this concern to the UME
- Scott and Erica, what would be the first steps in establishing a policy for 7 day return on quizzes?
 - Dr. Desy will be outlining the process regarding the release of grades on May 31st during the “Class Update with the Deans”.
- There is concern that the podcast load is too much and that many of the lectures are not high yield content (also very low yield for some). Is there a way we can condense the content so there's not an overload for content?
 - I think more than exam stuff, our learning is to prep us for clerkship and patient care.
 - UME is working to bring more family docs in to teach instead of specialists to help out with presenting generalist-relevant info
- There is also a lack of organization for some of the podcasts—i.e. one day had 8 hours lecture but a few hours overlapped so it was only 4 hours



- New course admin for Course 4 this year... she would appreciate that feedback! Will pass on.
- Live zoom rules that we cannot schedule AEBM electives at that time is restrictive and prohibiting
 - The answer is more about respecting preceptor time
 - Could they reschedule live zooms in the beginning or the end of the day. so that it wasn't right in the middle of the schedule in case you wanted to do something for the day
 - Lecturers are often on call and lecturing between cases, clinics. Changing their schedule may not be easy
- Everyone else is going back to school why aren't we?
 - It's only K-12 right now, not post-secondary.
- I wonder if there would be an opportunity to fight for us to be considered in the first phase as unlike a lot of post-secondary education, it is essential for many aspects of medical education to be in person. Especially as we are to operate as clerks in 8 months' time with the least amount of clinical experience
 - GAACs will take note of this and since there is interest, they will have the appropriate discussion
 - Keep in mind we are way ahead in terms of clinical exposure, we are getting way more than all schools across the country, therefore there is less to use for advocacy
 - Given the expedited timeline between the phases of opening up there is limited opportunity to push for anything to happen more quickly
- What about us being 3 years? Would it be worth trying to fight for it?
 - We directly compare what we're doing with McMaster since they are the other 3-year program and for reference, McMaster did OSCEs virtually with a pillow
 - In the province however, we will always be compared to UofA, which is tough.
 - Additionally, Calgary is a hotspot for covid usually, so this is an issue with planning

Open Student Q & A

Using Slido, students were allowed to submit questions anonymously to the CMSA. Students could also "like" a question to increase its priority in the list. Afterwards CMSA executive answered questions in order of interest and facilitated any subsequent discussion. Students could also pose questions without anonymity in the Zoom chat or by unmuting and speaking.



- I constantly feel unprepared to be in clinical environment and I am not sure what resources are available for that.
 - It does feel like some preceptors have higher expectations than they should considering that we have quite little clinical experience
- I feel like the UME has said they want student feedback on things, but it really feels like our feedback isn't considered when making decisions :(
- Haven't some schools like SAIT been able to get special requests to do some things in person? Can UME advocate that just for exams? Deferrals are not it.
 - SAIT's programs are very hands on so they have been allowed to go in person pretty early
 - We will have our clerkship no matter what, that is the generally the government's answer and the comparison for clinical experience
- Trying to make plans for the one week of vacation, is there a chance they could reschedule the exam during that week?
 - Highly unlikely since we only really have that one break, but we will confirm that with the UME
 - Please no more exams after breaks or long weekends. We are tired and need a break.
 - When you are unsuccessful, you do rewrites during the break, which does not help with mental health and stress.
- UofA gets their exam marks back 15 minutes after they write it, why can't we get them back sooner
 - UofA gets their score instantly and then they have the review right after the exam in a lecture hall—pre-COVID a lecture hall, post COVID over zoom.
- We are almost all vaccinated and wear masks and are spaced during exams. I thought schools were closed because of lack of staff. How does that impact us?
- Can we bring up being able to review our exams again? by the time we get a review session who knows what I had answered. feels like grades are all that counts.
 - How they remove our questions is highly suspicious based on what's happening across the country Nationally
 - We used to be able to do this in the past
- Instead of exam deferrals have open book exams and adjust MPL like other med schools. Deferrals are hard on students. Too many schedule changes causing burnout.
 - Some schools like UofA make exams open book to avoid deferrals. Deferrals are a huge burden to students.



- Can we make sure there's lots of IST in the remaining courses? (especially if shadowing is going to open up, or just time to catch up or mental health break)
 - UME says the schedule is made 2 years in advance, but they do make changes with COVID quickly.



Appendix A: Word Cloud Responses

- Lonely
- Unsupported by the school
- pupset
- exhausted
- Burnt out
- Overwhelmed
- tired
- isolated
- Frustrated
- You go Nat !
- Over it!
- takes waaaay to much caffeine to stay awake...
- Happy to have you peeps!
- Lonely AF.
- Completely overwhelmed
- failure
- big oof indeed
- Oooofffff.....
- Don't know how to answer that. Overwhelmed? Sometimes frustrated. Looking forward to doing things as a class soon (excited for that possibility)
- Terrible. The quality of education is poor (not the fault of our instructors, and in spite of heros like Hanan) and the UME seem to be more concerned with maintaining the illusion of fairness in exams, rather than providing the highest quality learning experience. Exams online should either be considered open book or should be proctored rather than punishing people with diverse learning styles who need to be able to go through an exam back and forth
- Strung out
- behind
- too many deadlines
- stressed
- sad
- not fabulous



Appendix B: Update After Deans' Meeting

Hey Echidnas!

As promised, here is an update regarding the meeting that we had with Dr. Weeks and Dr. Busche to follow-up on some of the questions and concerns that were raised at the CMSA Townhall. Please feel free to reach out to any of the executives on the CMSA with any further inquiries. The Deans will also be hosting a class update session on Monday, May, 31st at 12:30pm via. Zoom where they will further elaborate on some of the issues that have been raised recently. We wish you studying for the Anatomy and Course 4 exams in the coming weeks.

Regards,

Your Echidna CMSA Executive Team

On Friday May 28th, 2021, Natalya Patrick (VP SAW), Scott Bell (VP academic), Erica Lindquist (VP Academic), and Mathieu Chin (President) have the opportunity to discuss some of the questions and concerns that were raised at our Echidna Town Hall hosted on Wednesday, May 26th. Much of the conversation focused around the three topics that were discussed at the town hall which were Tuition Increases, Student Wellness and Academic Concerns. In the following few sections, we will discuss some of the dialogue that we had with Dr. Busche and Dr. Weeks in hopes that we can address some of the questions and concerns raised by the class. Though not a direct transcription of the conversation, we hope this summary will give you a high-level picture of the conversation that we had.

Tuition Increases

As discussed in the Town Hall, the proposed tuition increase that is expected to raise MD tuition by 15.7% in the coming years does not affect the Class of 2023, nor the incoming Class of 2024. This was again reiterated by Dr. Busche and Dr. Weeks in our meeting. As a point of clarification, through discussions that Mathieu Chin (President) had with Dr. Naugler earlier in the month, there is an understanding that the UME will be advocating towards using some of these funds from the increases in tuition towards the implementation of SAW resources, the revamping of a new MD curriculum, as well as increases in bursaries. The implementation of the above-mentioned resources are not



the reason for the increases in tuition, but instead are mainly driven by funding cuts imposed by the provincial government.

Likewise, much of the decision-making power goes beyond that of the UME and includes administration from the University of Calgary as a whole, who are the ones in charge of setting tuition costs for students across the entire campus. As a result of the increased tuition, however, the UME is advocating to the University of Calgary to use some of the funds towards programs and initiatives that will enhance the student and academic experience of the MD program. As bursaries were a point of contention during the Town Hall, it was clarified that the increases in tuition are not directly tied to having more bursaries but is an area that they are advocating towards the University of Calgary centrally to having more funding in. In addition, there were many questions raised by the class regarding the exact breakdown of where the funds from the tuition increase will go towards. This information however will unlikely be disclosed to students.

We also discussed the importance of addressing the various barriers of admission to medical school and how the increases in tuition will be an additional barrier, especially to BIPOC students who are already under-represented. In response, Dr. Weeks and Dr. Busche acknowledged this, mentioning that these are issues that are important to address at any MD program. In addition, they shared their insight in which students who are disadvantaged (BIPOC and low socioeconomic backgrounds) often are faced with barriers way before the admissions process, and that no students (at least in their memory as Assistant Deans in the UME) have had to drop out of medical school due to financial issues, **as there are various supports available to students once in the program**. They also mentioned that even following the tuition increases, MD students at UCalgary will still be in the lowest 1/3rd in tuition costs across the country.

It is also important to note that much of the decisions made regarding the tuition increases in the MD program are beyond the roles of Dr. Weeks and Dr. Busche and the comments shared in this discussion are to the best of their knowledge from conversations with Dr. Naugler.

Student Wellness

We wanted to take this opportunity to thank all the Echidnas who filled out our Wellness survey. We had a fantastic response rate and really appreciate all the insight that was shared. This will allow us, as the CMSA, as well as the UME, to better understand how to better address the prevalent issues in the class.

When discussing student Wellness with Dr. Weeks and Dr. Busche during this meeting, it was emphasized that the UME has and will continue to ensure that Student Wellness is a priority. This however has to be balanced with ensuring that students are prepared for



clerkship, residency, and one's entire career as a physician. Reflecting back on previous classes, it was mentioned that students have always found this period of pre-clerkship difficult due to the rigour of Course 4, even without the stresses of the pandemic. Likewise, the Class of 2022 (Tanuki's) had similar problems last year during this time.

As many students in our class have been concerned with the high rates of LOA's, this concern was brought up to the Deans. They mentioned that for our class, the UME has been generous with granting extended Leave of Absences (LOA) to students, which have been for a wide range of reasons. When asking for the number of LOA's granted, it was mentioned that this is information that will not be shared to ensure the privacy of those students who had to take a LOA is preserved. We inquired further regarding this, stating that this information will allow us to better understand if this is a systemic issue rather than an individual issue. In response, they mentioned that there are many variables at play and so it will be difficult to identify the reason for the LOA's.

In both the survey and the Town Hall, one of the themes that many students have raised was the isolation that they felt, which was in part caused by the pandemic and limited interactions with the class. Over the past few months, the CMSA has been in continuous dialog regarding when we are able to start having events. Unfortunately, much of the direction surrounding student organizations, as well as the university, hosting events comes from directions from the administration of the University of Calgary as a whole. As such, we have not been able to host any in-person events but are optimistic that with the restrictions being lifted in the coming months, we will be able to begin planning some events for the class. In the meantime, the *UME is open to ideas from students on how to realistically improve wellness and the feeling of isolation.*

Dr. Week's also wanted to point out that it has come to their understanding that there has been the perception that SAW is not available to students, though we would like our class to know that there are urgent appointments available to students who need it. These are often given to students for specific reasons, and one of the best methods of reaching SAW in urgent cases is calling. It has been acknowledged that to address this problem, Natalya will be reminding the class about SAW resources. We would also like to look into changing the SAW booking system to be able to triage appointments based on urgency in a manner where students can easily view the next available appointments. We would also highly encourage students to communicate the urgency of an appointment to the SAW team, as certain times are reserved for urgent appointments.

Academic Concerns

There have been many questions and concerns regarding when the Course 4 Final will be held. Though the exact date still remains unknown due to the provincial pandemic restrictions, Dr. Weeks stated that they are hoping that they are able to have the exam in-



person on the scheduled date, though if it has to be moved, every effort would be to have it before the break in July. Furthermore, if the exam cannot be accommodated before the break, it will not be scheduled during the week off nor the first few days back after the break.

In addition, many students in our class have raised the concern surrounding career exploration and the limitations imposed by the pandemic restrictions. Dr. Weeks and Dr. Busche are currently working closely with AHS in hopes of having shadowing return as soon as possible. They are hoping to have a better picture and an update regarding it in the coming weeks. They also reiterated that while they understand the stress our class has regarding career exploration, we are in a much better position than previous classes in the program, as career exploration was not as much of a focus previously. As such, they wanted to assure us that they have confidence that we will still perform well in the CaRMS match in our final year. The UME would like to assure us that despite the COVID-19 pandemic, our class is still on track with our clinical exposure when compared with previous classes. This is in part due to the increased number of elective exposures (more electives, the addition of career exploration days, aebm electives), earlier elective weeks, and later clerkship ranking deadline compared to previous years. We are also exposed to clinical practice before any other school in Canada. The deans stated that they believe that our earlier exposure has made us conscious about our inexperience in the clinical field despite being on par with other years, which may be leading to some of the anxiety being experienced.

Regarding the turnover time for exams, Dr. Desy will be providing an update regarding this at the Deans Update on May 31st, 2021. She will look to share some of the things that occur behind the scenes and the process of getting our exams back to us. On a similar note, when asked about having the opportunity to review exams, they mentioned that there have been studies which have shown that the process of reviewing exams has minimal benefit. When reviewing exams, they do not allow students to understand the concept of the question but only the answer for that particular question itself.



For more information on topics discussed during the town hall or any CMSA matters, email us at

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If you would like to contact a specific member of the CMSA, the emails are listed below:

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